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David Daniel Palmer: "The Educator" as the Legacy of the Third Generation

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David Daniel Palmer was born into the crucible of chiropractic formulation. He would be raised in the environment of BJ Palmer's leadership and school domination and the acquisition of the broadcasting empire that shaped the profession and its ultimate acceptance. With the investiture of David D. Palmer as the third president of the Palmer School, a new era of academic and professional growth took place at the Palmer institutions. During his presidency, transition of the school from proprietary to a non-profit status was achieved, as was full accreditation. The Palmer Junior College and a new relationship with the Davenport community was initiated. Reorganization of the Palmer faculty, new admissions procedures, a strong alumni association and improved facilities were accomplished under the Palmer known as "The Educator."

Daniel David Palmer II (1906-1978) (he was renamed David Daniel early in life) was the most neglected of our famous "First Family of Chiropractic."

Dr. Dave, as he preferred to be called, is a subject I can relate to not only from books or hearsay but from real life. I not only worked at Palmer College during Dave Palmer's presidency, but I participated in the discussions and programs he implemented. I have strong memories to rekindle.

I am convinced that David Palmer's place in history is neglected. While D.D., B.J. and Mabel Palmer have been consistently lauded and even idolized, David Palmer has not been accorded the recognition he deserves despite the enormous contribution he made to the profession and to chiropractic education. (Gielow, 1978; CCF, 1995; JCCA, JACA, 1978)

If, in redressing this slight toward David Palmer, my comments are construed as critical of others, let me assure you that my motive is simply to be objective. When we look at the legacy the Palmer family has given our profession, we are best served not by viewing them as having golden haloes, but as mere mortals with the same sort of strengths and weaknesses, beauties and blemishes typical of us all. In any case, to the degree that my few words help enhance appreciation for Dr. Dave's contribution I will feel deeply satisfied.

I believe this portion of chiropractic history has a powerful moral begging to be shared. As has been said, "History is philosophy teaching by example." There is tremendous relevance to the example of Dave Palmer's way of looking at issues and handling things. He possessed personal qualities that are not always imitated by some who would lead our profession. Yet those qualities are vital, especially now at this historic milestone, the beginning of our second century.

What happens to us under adversity depends in a large measure on the stuff we're made of. Dave Palmer took over the leadership of Palmer College at a stressful time for the college and the profession. His success proved he had the necessary ingredients.

I have selected nine specifics of Dr. Dave's contribution: Civic relationship; Professional and trade association unity; accreditation; faculty upgrade; entry level upgrade; taking Palmer College from a privately owned institution to a public, non-profit institution; the creation of a Board of Trustees; the creation of the PCC International Alumni Association, and finally, the upgrade of Palmer College facilities. (In Memory, 1978)

It is significant that he didn't deal with these issues one after another. To a large extent he dealt with them all at the same time. Dave's genius was in his ability to see the big picture, to understand the dynamics at work from the interaction of a variety of forces, and to manage those dynamics in a way that all the pieces of his vision fell into place at the right time. What is more, he pushed ahead despite no small amount of criticism and prejudice.

Imagine, if you will, David Palmer taking over the presidency of Palmer College in 1961. The college was destitute, its future dubious. The buildings were overgrown by a jungle of vines. Passersby saw Palmer College as some ancient lost temple with cultish activities going on behind crumbling walls. B.J. had alienated many in the Quad-City

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community and in the chiropractic profession. He was either hated or worshiped, but the end result was the college had been set apart. The time for decisions was at hand. What would Dave Palmer do?

"To think is to act," as Emerson said. Dr. Dave sized up the situation and acted. He set about to transform the image of the institution. The name was changed from the Palmer School of Chiropractic to Palmer College of Chiropractic. (Gibbons, 1977)

Right away he opened up the college to the surrounding community. The vines came off and the buildings were repaired and made more accessible. Dave ordered B.J.'s ubiquitous epigrams photographed for posterity and then painted over. To him their quaint moralizing represented another era and to a certain extent the cult of personality. They would not fit with the professionalism he envisioned.

As you can imagine, Dave's decisive action was loudly criticized by those who thought things should continue exactly as B.J. had done them. But Dave had the courage of his convictions and pushed ahead. (Williams, 1978)

He immediately began a series of town meetings. He invited in politicians, members of the legal profession, law enforcement officers, educators and financial people for prime rib dinners and short presentations about Palmer College and chiropractic. I participated in many of those dinners, talking about the viability of chiropractic philosophy. Dave had established many relationships with those community leaders, and now he brought them into more direct contact with chiropractic.

The town meetings were extremely well-received. They signaled the beginning of an improved relationship between Palmer College and the area we today call the Quad-Cities. More than that, they set a pattern for community involvement that the college and many of its alumni have followed ever since.

Dave's second contribution stemmed from the fact that he was deeply chagrined at the fragmentation of the profession as represented by two professional associations that were often at odds. He saw clearly that the profession would have to speak with a single voice if it were to be heard and understood by the outside world.

At the first Homecoming after he assumed the presidency of the PSC, he asked the professional associations, at that time the ICA and the NCA, to consider burying their differences and merging. He came under pressure and was branded a "traitor" for selling out the ICA, which during the B.J. era had always been considered synonymous with Palmer alumni. But Dave had a long-range view. He knew that professional unity was necessary.

What is sometimes overlooked is that his initiative worked. The two groups merged into the ACA in 1963. Of course, what happened was that Dave did not have control of all of the profession. The ICA name had never been legally invalidated, and the ICA was reborn.

At the second homecoming of his presidency, Dave began another initiative which would result in greater acceptance of chiropractic by the outside world and greater internal unity. It was this bold stroke—his third contribution—that is partially responsible for the measure of unity within the profession and its acceptance that exists today.

In 1962 there was no single objective accrediting agency recognized by the government. Colleges were accredited by the two professional associations, and Palmer was an ICA-accredited institution. Dave invited both associations and all the college presidents to a meeting at the Blackhawk Hotel in downtown Davenport to consider the possibility of creating a single accrediting agency.

Surprisingly, the presidents of both the ICA and the ACA agreed to pursue the idea and there began a long, involved process that 12 years later, in 1974, produced the Council on Chiropractic Education, the CCE.

The ACA had the more sophisticated accreditation program, and it went ahead, despite commitments to wait, and unilaterally presented its program for the approval of the U.S. Office of Education. I remember visiting with a representative of that office who came to the Palmer campus. He assured me that the government had decided to move on the creation of the CCE in order to get *something* off the ground. However, he was adamant that the federal government would not allow the CCE to be a political organization, dominated by a portion of the profession.

I'm happy to say that things have worked out that way. The CCE is today perceived as a credible, non-political accrediting agency for all of chiropractic education.

The day after the CCE was approved by the U.S. Office of Education, Dave Palmer submitted Palmer College's application for CCE accreditation. Eventually, Palmer College also received North Central Association accreditation, though Dave passed away shortly before that occurred.

Dave's fourth contribution was to upgrade the faculty. From 1936 to 1956 Palmer had been an upper cervical institution. Palmer taught full-spine in order to meet licensure requirements but it didn't encourage it to be practiced. When B.J. decided, without much warning, that Palmer should become a full-spine school, the faculty weren't really prepared for the change. So, when Dave took over he pushed for further faculty development.

Dave had graduated with Clarence Gonstead, who later developed a full-spine system. Dave sent the entire faculty to Gonstead seminars. Most of the analytical mode of what is today known as the "Palmer Package" reflects Gonstead's work. Dave was also friends with James Parker, and he sent the entire faculty to Parker seminars for business and practice management training.

Dave was always interested in faculty growth, and he knew that better salaries were necessary to hire and keep the best faculty members. It wasn't until 1972 or 1973 that a Palmer faculty member could survive solely on a Palmer faculty salary.

In 1965, Dave asked me to take the position of Admis-

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sions Director Pro Tem. My charge was to develop a greater pool of student applicants. I came back to Dave a month after taking the job and told him, "The problem is not lack of interest in chiropractic but lack of money."

We were in a situation where we were trying to recruit students while demanding cash in advance. Of course, other colleges and universities were comfortably ensconced in loan programs such as the National Defense Loan program. Chiropractic colleges, including Palmer, were not.

Dave went to work on that problem, his fifth contribution. He hired Dr. Fred Gehl, a Logan Basic grad, who discovered a way for non-accredited schools to access the loan program. Such schools had to get signed letters from accredited colleges that they would accept our program credits. Dr. Gehl obtained three such letters, and in 1972 Palmer College was included in the NDL program. What a boost that meant for enrollment, increasing from 600 to 2,200 almost overnight. (Tribute, 1978)

This is an example of David Palmer's cohesiveness. Dave saw how things could fit together. He was working for accreditation and student loans. Accreditation required upgrading the entry level of students. Palmer went from accepting high school diplomas or G.E.D.'s to requiring two years of college education. In 1965 Dave set up the Palmer Junior College to help facilitate the two year degree.

If the money hadn't been available thanks to the NDL loan program, the college never could have increased the entrance requirements. Everything depended on everything else.

For his sixth contribution, Dave Palmer saw that fundamental to progress for the college was changing its status from a privately held corporation to a non-profit 501(c)(3) institution, and from the day he took over as president he began working toward that end. The advantages were obvious—tax-free status and greater likelihood of accreditation. Of course, the shift which occurred in 1965 meant relinquishing a certain amount of family power while giving the public sector and Palmer alumni more governance.

Under the non-profit status, Palmer College was to be governed by a Board of Trustees, Dave Palmer's seventh contribution. That meant a fundamental change in the management of the college. No longer would a single individual exercise the dominance of a B.J. From that day forward the college would benefit from a variety of perspectives. In many ways this development in 1973 was simply a part of a natural evolution that established Palmer College in the mainstream of education. This seventh contribution was a vital one. (Palmer, Dave, 1977)

It is interesting to note that D.D. Palmer originally applied the name Fountain Head to himself as an individual. Later, B.J. applied it to the college. By Dave Palmer's time, it was apparent that the college was a greater entity than any individual. It would be the Fountainhead whether a Palmer was at the helm or not.

Today Palmer College, especially as part of the Palmer Chiropractic University System, stands for something far greater than any individual, any family or any singular viewpoint. Rather than to concentrate power, Dave Palmer's approach—and a very valuable part of his legacy—was to empower others.

While B.J. had long been suspicious of sharing college control with alumni, Dave saw a strong alumni association as vital to the institution's well-being. His eighth contribution lay in his understanding that Palmer alumni held the potential not just for help in fund-raising but for help in promoting Palmer Chiropractic. He knew that alumni input was also of great value in developing the curriculum. How could we teach what would meet current demands if we weren't really plugged into what was happening in the field?

Dr. Dave's encouragement was an important factor in the organization of the PCC International Alumni Association in 1961, which developed into one of the best-organized alumni associations of any college or university in the country.

An adequate physical plant was another key to growth. As his ninth contribution, Dr. Dave worked tirelessly to acquire and build additional facilities. The David D. Palmer Health Sciences Library, West and East Halls and the old Student Union became part of the campus. He knew how to run a capital campaign, and his leadership secured the necessary support from alumni and the Quad-City community. When the Anton Meister estate failed to deliver promised funds for a new auditorium, Dave worked with the alumni to obtain the necessary financing.

Dr. Dave had received excellent business training, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance and Commerce and later completing the Advanced Management Program of the Harvard School of Business. Whereas B.J.'s financial people had conservatism inappropriate to the times, Dave had a thoroughly modern outlook about financial matters. For example, under B.J. tuition had been kept at $30 a month for many years. During Dave's presidency it was raised every year.

Along with his business sense, Dave had certain personality traits that served him, the college and the profession well. He was socially, politically, and culturally—as well as economically—astute. Some observers believe Dave inherited those qualities from his mother, Mabel. Certainly he possessed a certain gentility and sensitivity to people that B.J. lacked. Some B.J. lovers considered Dave weak simply because he was cordial, but they seriously underestimated his quiet, courageous leadership. He was a builder of bridges, not an architect of confrontation.

Dave Palmer recognized that change is constant—if things aren't changing they're dead—and Dave seized opportunities to use that change. Cicero put it this way: "Probabilities direct the conduct of the wise man." Dave

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had a gift for understanding probabilities in a way that very few people are capable of. At the same time he understood those aspects of chiropractic that are eternally true, and he could relate change to chiropractic without compromising its integrity.

Recently, Palmer College of Chiropractic West, Palmer's sister school in the Palmer Chiropractic University System, presented Vickie Palmer, Dr. Dave's daughter and Chairman of the Board, the honorary Doctor of Chiropractic Humanities Degree. In presenting the degree, my friend and colleague, Dr. Peter Martin, president of Palmer West, had this to say about Vickie:

"Like her father, David Palmer, she promotes a kind and gentle view of things, with an abiding faith that right will triumph over might, that our good work will not go unrewarded, and that chiropractic will one day fill a viable and universally acceptable place in health care. However stormy the seas, with Vickie Palmer at the helm our Palmer Colleges will continue steady." (Martin, 1995)

I mention this because much of what is happening today through the Palmer Chiropractic University System is reminiscent of Vickie's father, Dave Palmer. I am proud to be part of a way of looking at issues and handling things that takes into account the global context and is working to further, not just the parochial interests of a few, but the best in chiropractic for the many. The legacy of the third generation of the Palmers has been passed to the fourth and is extended to us all. (Palmer, Dave, 1967)

Today our entire profession is caught amid massive social, economic, cultural and political change that will have far-reaching impact on mankind's battle against disease and on how health care is delivered. How will we react to these profound changes?

Can we successfully manage 21st Century dynamics? Can we develop our interpersonal skills to the level of our clinical skills? Can we put principles for the greater good ahead of short-term gains for ourselves? Can we build more bridges and make less war?

As we enter our second century, the future of our profession is still in doubt. Make no mistake. The challenges are still with us.

May each of us individually and our profession collectively take a legacy from Dr. Dave, the Educator.

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